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## **‘The Ongoing Struggle Against Boko Haram’**

*Remarks by U.S. Rep Chris Smith (NJ-04)  
Chairman, House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,  
Global Human Rights and Int’l Organizations  
Boko Haram hearing  
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Since November 2013, the U.S. government has declared Boko Haram and its affiliate Ansaru to be Foreign Terrorist Organizations. This supposedly provides further tools with which to fight such organizations and their sponsors. However, an Administration that resisted the FTO designation for so long continues to downplay its significance. This hearing is intended to provide information on that reluctance and on obstacles to our effective security and/or military assistance to the Nigerian government in this anti-terror fight.

Boko Haram is a Nigerian terrorist group whose name in Arabic means “people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and jihad.” The name “Boko Haram” is a translation from Hausa meaning that conventional education (boko) is forbidden (haram).

According to various reports, Boko Haram began in 2003 when about 200 university students and unemployed youth created a camp in Yobe State near the Niger border to withdraw from what they considered the corrupt, sinful and unjust Nigerian government, and their community was supposedly founded on Islamic law. The group was then known by the nickname the Nigerian Taliban. Violent clashes with Nigerian security forces nearly destroyed the group several times, but its charismatic leader, Mohammed Yusuf kept the group alive until his death while in police custody in July 2009. Since Yusuf’s death, there have been various spokesmen but one person who is believed to be the nominal leader: Abubakar Shekau. Furthermore, a breakaway group known as Ansaru has appeared on the scene, but still coordinates with the original Boko Haram.

Because of its repeated attacks against Christian targets during holy days such as Christmas and Easter, Boko Haram is seen by some as principally an anti-Christian organization. This past year alone, Boko Haram terrorists are believed to have killed more than 1,000 Christians in Nigeria. In fact, it is estimated that more than 60% of Christians killed worldwide because of religious intolerance die in Nigeria. However, it would not be a

completely accurate interpretation of the facts to assume that what is happening in Nigeria is just a Muslim-Christian conflict.

The kidnapping of nearly 300 Nigerian schoolgirls in the Borno State town of Chibok on April 14 has caught the attention of the international community, albeit two weeks after the incident. However, the kidnapping of eight additional girls after that has been an afterthought, and the kidnapping of another 20 women last week has yet to receive much notice. Prior to the April kidnappings, Boko Haram had generally killed boys but let girls go, warning them to go home and give up their dreams of education. There have been previous incidents, however, in which girls have been kidnapped, though not in large numbers as in Chibok.

Now Boko Haram leaders realize that kidnapping girls gets worldwide publicity, and whether these girls are recovered or not, they know that they can do this again to get publicity for their group. The very new media used to galvanize pressure on Nigeria to obtain the freedom of the kidnapped girls is being used by Boko Haram to brag of its ability to disrupt society and taunt Nigerians and their government about their ability to take their women and girls away. Several videos, purportedly of the kidnapped Chibok girls, have been released, echoing previously-used al Qaeda tactics in this regard.

In the past two years, our subcommittee has sent a staff delegation to investigate the Boko Haram threat; this past September, Gregory Simpkins, our subcommittee's staff director, and I visited Abuja and Jos to further look into this matter, and I just returned the other day from Abuja, where I took time out from another human rights mission in Nigeria to further investigate the ongoing struggle against this terrorist threat.

Last week, I met in Abuja with one of the Chibok girls who escaped early on in the ordeal. This brave young woman has suffered much and was clearly traumatized and in emotional pain. You could hear it in her voice and see it in her eyes as she sat motionless, recounting her story. Yet she spoke of her concern not for herself, but her friends and classmates who remain in captivity.

I met with a Muslim father of two girls abducted from the Chibok School. Fighting back tears, he said the agony was unbearable. The story of his daughters underscored the fact that Boko Haram brutalizes Muslims as well.

I also met with other Boko Haram victims, including a Christian mother whose two daughters were abducted in February 2012. She told us her husband was shot on the spot. Three months later, Boko Haram returned and asked if her son had converted to Islam. When she said no—he was shot and killed.

We wasted more than a year of not using all our tools because of the specious argument that doing so would provide publicity to terrorists, and now the Administration is downplaying what the FTO designation can accomplish. There must be robust use of the benefits of this designation if we are to be successful in the battle against terrorism in Nigeria.

The three criteria for an organization to be declared a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. government are: 1) it must be a foreign organization, 2) it must engage in terrorist activity and 3) it must threaten the security of United States nationals, U.S. national security or the economic interests of the United States. Clearly, Boko Haram/Ansaru meets that test.

This was why I introduced H.R. 3209 last year to urge the Administration to declare Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

The proliferation of voices speaking for Boko Haram and the new faction lead some to believe this is not a coherent organization, but we have learned that it is actually a very sophisticated organization operating in cells disconnected from each other but coordinating at a high level. Some also believe this group is purely a domestic terrorist group operating in Nigeria. We found that to be a false assumption as well.

Boko Haram/Ansaru does wage attacks on the Nigerian government and other domestic targets. Nevertheless, their actions prove their participation in the global jihad movement that wages violent war worldwide to establish their skewed version of Islam as the prevailing religion globally. Various actions, such as the bombing of the United Nations Abuja office in August 2011, and numerous statements from Boko Haram spokesmen indicate their international intent.

This international focus has been confirmed by American and Nigerian intelligence information. In fact, there was at least one American present during the UN bombing, which if the Administration had acknowledged that at the time, would have created pressure to use the FTO designation then. As recently as the Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on May 21<sup>st</sup>, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Sarah Sewell would neither confirm nor deny that fact. In fact, the State Department has refused to confirm what we now know to be true since the 2011 UN building bombing.

When then-Assistant Secretary of State Johnny Carson told us in our July 2012 hearing on Nigeria that Boko Haram's attacks were caused mostly by animus against the Nigerian government, he was wrong in his apportionment of cause and effect. There is tremendous animus toward the Nigerian government and an effort to embarrass President Jonathan. However, Boko Haram is determined to convert or kill Christians and Muslims they believe oppose them.

Poverty did not create Boko Haram – religious fanaticism did. Still, underdevelopment in northern Nigeria provides fodder for a level of discontent with the federal government that provides at least tacit northern support for anyone opposing the government. If northern Nigeria were its own country, it would be among the poorest, least educated, least healthy countries in the world.

Largely due to the terrorist violence in the North, an estimated 3.3 million Nigerians are displaced – making Nigeria the world's third largest displaced population, behind only Syria and Columbia. Many of those displaced people are farmers, which will certainly disrupt the next harvesting season and further impoverish Nigeria's suffering people.

Yet the blame for the perennial lack of development in northern Nigeria should not be heaped on the federal government alone. We have been told that northern states have money for development, and one national legislator from the north acknowledged that each member of Nigeria's Parliament has at least \$1 million dollars (not Nigerian naira) at his or her disposal to use for constituent services. National and state governments in Nigeria have to be pushed to do more on development with money they already have.

It is imperative that we provide the training and support for Nigerians to develop their own capacity to help Nigeria to end the Boko Haram threat. The Leahy Law, which forbids U.S. support for military and security forces involved in human rights violations, is seen as an obstacle to achieving that goal. We need to examine this matter further if our assistance is to be effective.

We also need to ensure that our investigative capacity under the Foreign Terrorist Organization designation is sufficient to identify those providing material and other assistance to Boko Haram. Without this element, our sanctions on Boko Haram and its leaders will not be effective.

The Boko Haram crisis is complex, but it can be understood and tackled effectively if we know the relevant facts. We have with us today witnesses who will shed significant light on this situation so that we are better able to proceed in helping to end this threat to Nigeria, its neighbors and the international community.